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ABSTRACT

The document examines a number of sex education programs and reviews some of the problems and issues educators encounter in planning and initiating sex education programs. Included is a discussion of population background of Polk County, Iowa and a presentation by school administrators of five reasons which favor the teaching of sex education: (1) children receive most sex education from peers, not parents; (2) concerned parents feel a strong need for providing sex education; (3) children are asking for help with problems related to sexual adjustment; (4) children want accurage information of normal sexual development; and (5) the program provides an opportunity to reach parents and assist them with their questions. Also discussed is the introduction of a sex education program to the community. Several techniques are listed to reduce public opposition. Finally, the study concerns itself with the problem of teacher selection. (Author/MC)

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Program Planning: The Embryonic Stage

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When speaking about sex education programs, I am reminded of the kindergarten girl who at the end of the semester brought home her first report card. Without saying anything, but on the verge of tears, she handed it to her mother. After looking it over and finding that Mary had received all "E's", she asked Mary what was upsetting her so much. Mary exclaimed "Mom---I got an "F" in sex and I'm not even taking it!"

In many schools at the present time little Marys don't have an opportunity to participate in such a course at the kindergarten level. But in some districts, such as Urbandale, a community adjacent to Des Moines, plans are being made to incorporate family living material into the curriculum at all grade levels, including kindergarten.

The main purpose of this section of the symposium is to examine a number of sex education programs in operation at the present time or under consideration, and to review some of the problems and issues educators encountered in planning and initiating sex education programs.

Before discussing these programs, I would like to give you a little background concerning the population on which this study was based.

The survey was conducted in Polk County which is located in Central Iowa. The county includes the city of Des Moines and eight smaller communities. The school districts vary considerably in size, from over forty elementary schools to one. They vary in the type of community they serve, rural to suburb to urban. Plus the educational philosophies vary considerably among the different districts. One district, Urbandale, has an extensive continuous progress program, others have team teaching, still others have departmentalized programs. And then of course there are districts using the more traditional self contained classroom approach.

The community interests and educational philosophies are important factors to take into consideration when planning a sex education program. So while most of the school administrators are in agreement that the schools should make available education materials to the students, they differ in how extensive they feel this program should be, as we will see shortly.

The reasons stated by the various school administrators indicating why they feel the schools should be involved in sex education have been very well summarized in "A Guide to Develop Programs for Family Living and Personal Growth" prepared by the State of Iowa, Department of Public Instruction. They present the following reasons in support of the position that the schools should be involved in teaching sex education:

(1) Children and Youth Receive Most Sex Education From Their Peers, Not Parents.

As a result much of the information they receive is often inaccurate and carrying overtones of secrecy and anxiety. These socalled "facts" are often couched in a framework of confusion over the full extent of the issues involved. Further, the questions of moral values, responsible freedom, and the importance of the value of human personality are seldom conveyed.

(2) Concerned Parents Feel a Strong Need for Providing Sex Education.

Many parents are in revolt against the cheap image that sex has taken in our society today, and they are not convinced that

(2) Concerned Parents Feel a Strong Need for Providing Sex Education. (continued)

they can do the WHOLE job of providing accurate factual information about human growth and development. Many parents even question whether or not they are the best source for objective learning of sex information, especially for children in the teen years. Most parents agree that the school can provide supplemental help in developing moral and ethical values concerning sex attitudes and conduct due to an objective environment for learning.

(3) Children and Youth Are Asking for Help to Face the Many Problems Related to Sexual Adjustment.

The constant display of sex symbols, earlier marriages, and growing number of teenage divorces present a series of new problems for our society. Because of these many factors in our society, the school needs to assist the home and church in helping youth to be aware of the need to develop a responsible personal moral code. The personal counseling that should be a part of this program could also help youth face important decisions regarding their sexual behavior.

(4) Children and Youth Want Accurate Information Concerning the Normal Development Toward Sexual Maturity.

The advent of puberty is a time when the adolescent is filled with many feelings and emotions that need an explanation. A vast number of youth do not receive sex information from the home and are not a part of a local

(4) Children and Youth Want Accurate Information Concerning the Normal Development Toward Sexual Maturity. (Continued) church where this information may be available. Accurate information can help fortify youth against exploitation by others or against the misuses of their bodies. It can hopefully lead to more wholesome attitudes.

(5) The Sex Education Program in the School Provides an Opportunity to Reach Parents and Assist Them With Their Questions.

Many parents are products of a generation where formal sex education was not provided. They admit to being confused about the facts of human growth and reproduction. They often reveal that they hold irrational fears and superstitions about sexual conduct that have been carried over from childhood. A comprehensive program in sex education, kindergarten through 12th grade, could give impetus to a regular program of family life and sex education for parents in the community.

Deciding that the school has a responsibility in the teaching of family living material is an important first step in establishing a family living curriculum. But it is only one step in a series of steps which must be taken into consideration if the program is to be successful. Another step is the introduction of the idea to the community in a manner which brings forth their support. The school districts in Polk County have varied considerably in the degree to which they have involved the community during the initial planning stages of the family living program.

At this time I should probably insert the fact that when most of the school districts discuss this educational program with the public, they refer to it as family living rather than sex education. The change in terminology alone seems to reduce much of the initial public resistance. Plus, family living is a more accurate discription of the subject content.

The Des Moines Independent School District first received pressure from the PTA and AMA Auxilary encouraging them to present family living material in the schools. Following the suggestion, the school administrators prepared and initiated a program which is held in conjunction with the sixth grade health curriculum.

Des Moines has apparently had some second thoughts on their initial procedure. Recently the school board voted to establish a citizen's committee to examine all aspects of sex education or family living as it is presently taught in Des Moines. Dr. George Caudill, a Des Moines School board member, felt that the committee would be important in building community support for sex education. Citizens supporting and opposing the involvement of the schools in teaching family living material are represented on the committee. They found that there are generally two groups of persons opposing sex education. One group opposes it out of political motives. The other group is made up of people who have heard rumors and read misleading propaganda and have doubts about what actually is being taught.

The decision to establish a citizen's committee came after delegations of protesting citizens appeared before the school board a number of times. Dr. White, Director of Physical Education, Health and Safety Education, noted that while much criticism was voiced against the program, only seventy-five students were withheld, by parental request, from the family living program

which was offered to 18,000 students. Dr. White further states that most of the opposition was not voiced by concerned parents, but rather by organizations looking for a cause.

Urbandale intends to eventually include the community in planning a family living program. But at the present time the administrators are taking a very close look at the existing educational program to see what facets of family living are already a part of the program and what areas need to be strengthened or introduced. A proposed curriculum has been submitted to the faculty for their recommendations and approval.

Ankeny states that they have had a family living program in existence for sometime - long before the topic became a controversial issue. An interested Jr. High teacher and principal drew up the plans and incorporated the program into the required economics course offered to ninth graders. Ankeny has received only minor criticism from some of the community church groups. The students feel the program is worthwhile and provide the support needed to justify its existence.

A different approach has been used by West Des Moines School District. They are starting out with a community committee, which will serve in an advisory and evaluative capacity. The committee membership consists of students, religious leaders, educators, parents, school board members and medical doctors. A curious situation was noted in committee discussions. Members frequently encouraged that the present program be maintained, apparently as a means to prevent the committee from discussing and recommending a new and possibly more detailed or involved program. The expression of satisfaction was in reality a defense mechanism.

Which method of planning is best? The decision to begin with school administrators or the community will probably have to be determined by local districts with respect to their particular population.

Techniques recommended to reduce public opposition include:

(1) Allowing interested citizens to take part in the initial planning.

(2) Informing the community of proposed programs.

(3) Inviting parents to preview all material included in the program.

(4) Giving parents the opportunity to withhold their children from the program.

(5) Teaching the subject matter with respect and discretion.

(6) Encouraging students to discuss the presented material with their parents.

In setting up a family living program there are a number of factors which must be considered concerning the structure of the course. Such as, what grade levels should take part, what context should be included, whether it should be a separate or integrated program, who should do the teaching and which visual aids should be used. Just as the districts vary in size and in the populations they serve, the administrators differ in how they feel the formal family living program should be structured.

Ankeny's program is a 8-9 week session for ninth graders. As mentioned above it is a unit in the required economics course. The course outline includes dating, group influences, going steady, attitudes toward sex, love vs infatuation, sex and dating problems, human physiology, premarital sex relations and veneral diseases. The classes are coed except for the lessons on human physiology. Some family living material is covered in the senior high physiology and home economics courses which are elected

by many st dents. Des Moines presents a human growth unit to sixth graders in conjunction with the health curriculum. The unit is divided into four lessons: 1) life beginnings, 2) growth, 3) cell study, and 4) environmental influences. The sixth grade teacher, nurse and principal serve as a team in teaching the unit. The team members are required to attend a special preparatory workshops during which they become aware of the concepts and attitudes to be presented, and are given suggestions for worthwhile classroom activities. A list of typical questions asked by sixth graders is also made available. North Polk has a nine week family living program for seventh graders which is conducted by the guidance counselor and is separate from the main educational program. The North Polk Counselor feels that this separation is necessary in order to facilitate the expression of feelings. Mr. Antrim, West Des Moines Director of Elementary Education, believes that it is best to integrate the family living program into the existing educational program so that it will be presented in the proper prospective as one facet of living rather than singling it out as a special issue. Frank Nugent, Urbandale Curriculum Director, has pointed out that much family living material is already present in most educational programs. It just hasn't been spotlighted or labeled.

Urbandale has proposed a developmental family living program which includes material for all grade levels. The concepts introduced at the Primary 1 level include school membership; family membership, family differences, roles and activities, rights and privacy of others; animal families and body care. At Primary 2 - family changes, babies after birth, and growth variations in boys and girls are the topics of discussion. Reproduction of living things is introduced at the Primary

3 level. At level 4 - the major topics are human family relations, community, friends, ourselves, reproduction, nutrition, cell structure and growth rate. The topics at level 5 include understanding, and growth and development. Concepts discussed at the sixth level include leadership qualities, good followers, respecting others, flexibility and adaptability, reproduction, sexual union, embryonic and fetal development and birth.

In the seventh, eight and ninth grades, the family living program is part of the health curriculum. The concepts emphasized in the family living units include understanding self, exercise and your body, appearence problems, nutrition and health, infectious diseases, family relations, becoming a sexual being, and dating.

High school students can elect a course on human behavior in which sexual morality is discussed. Eighty-five percent of the high school students request this course. The class is coed and set up for both lectures and small group discussions. The students are also required to prepare a paper on a self selected topic.

Another topic of concern in setting up a family living program is the assignment of teachers. When the administrators were asked who they felt should teach the course, they were more concerned about the individual's personality rather than the subject matter the teacher was prepared to teach. The administrators were pretty much in agreement in feeling that the individual working with students on the family living program should be emotionally stable, should have his own sex roll defined, and should be generally unshockable. It was further suggested that the teacher be married and have children.

Dr. White feels that the teacher should have an excellent knowledge of children and no personal "hang-ups" which would interfere with the presentation. He further encourages the teachers to ask for the assistance of an experienced resource person. He states that "this person should be a member of the school staff with whom the children are acquainted and a person who has a fairly extensive background in psychology, physiology and birth processes In addition to teaching experience anyone serving as a resource person must have that very special ability to create a reciprocal, comfortable permissive environment for all concerned and under any conditions."

David Alexander, Ankeny Curriculum Coordinator, feels that only a few teachers are qualified to teach this type of material. To facilitate in the presentation of material, Ankeny uses a large number of audio-visual aids, such as pamphlets, films and vidio taped panel discussions prepared by community religious leaders. Personnel from the medical profession are also called in as guest lecturers. Other administrators expressed an interest in using any visual aids available that assist in presenting material in an accurate and acceptable manner.

The experiences the various districts in Polk County have had in planning and initiating family living programs show that with careful consideration of the community interests, the cognitive and social development of the students, and the appropriate course context and audiovisual aids, family living programs can be an accepted, informative and well justified addition to the total educational program.